

With the advent of No Child Left Behind, the federal government has required all schools to improve student performance, but it has failed to provide the support that students, teachers, and schools need to reach NCLB's strict goals. Because I believe that students and teachers cannot demonstrate improvement through testing alone, I have introduced several bills that will help make schools safer, more stable places for students to grow and learn. When students are safe at school and receive adequate support to meet the challenges they face, they are more likely to stay in school and to thrive there.

Safe Schools Improvement Act: Students cannot learn when they are shamed, intimidated, or in fear for their physical safety. To help all children succeed in school, we must recognize that bullying is not just “kids being kids.” It is harmful and damaging behavior that adults must take seriously. As part of my continuing efforts to reduce bullying and harassment in our schools, I was pleased to introduce the Safe Schools Improvement Act in 2007. Current federal law provides funds to promote school safety but does not expressly focus on issues of bullying or harassment. As a condition of receiving future Safe Schools funding, the Safe Schools Improvement Act would require schools and districts to ensure that their codes of conduct specifically prohibit bullying and harassment and would require states to include bullying and harassment data in their state-wide reporting. The legislation would also allow schools to train faculty and staff on how to prevent bullying and address it effectively when it does occur. Parts of this bill were incorporated into the first draft of the NCLB reform and renewal bill. I look forward to continuing to work on the NCLB reform bill to ensure that it includes all of this important legislation.

Bullying and Gang Reduction for Improved Education Act: A companion to the Safe Schools Improvement Act, the Bullying and Gang Reduction for Improved Education Act would allow states and localities to use Safe Schools funds for comprehensive bullying and gang prevention programs, including bullying and gang research, school-based counseling and referral services, emergency intervention programs, and telephone hotlines for the victims of bullies and gangs. The bill expands the purpose of the Safe Schools Act to specifically include the promotion of healthy, physically active lifestyles and to prevent bullying, harassment, and gang activity. Parts of this bill, too, were included in the first draft of the NCLB reform and renewal bill.

Put School Counselors Where They're Needed Act: The average student-to-counselor ratio in California's public schools is more than 900 to one, a ratio that hardly allows for individual attention and intensive support. Perhaps that is why we have a drop-out crisis in the nation, with 7,000 students dropping out of high school every single day. Unfortunately, in California, counselor-to-student ratios are almost always determined by the overall student population of a school, rather than by the number of students at risk of dropping out. My bill, the Put School Counselors Where They're Needed Act, would address this problem by providing funding for additional counselors in high schools with high drop-out rates. These additional counselors would work intensively with students at risk and would collaborate with parents, teachers, and others to create a comprehensive plan to get these students back on the right track.

Increased Student Achievement through Increased Student Support Act: Schools in

underserved communities suffer disproportionately from a lack of support personnel and other resources. Without sufficient support, teachers have less time to deliver quality instruction and raise student achievement. To provide students in low-income neighborhoods the same opportunities as others for a productive and supportive learning environment, I joined my colleague Rep. Edolphus “Ed” Towns of New York to introduce the Increased Student Achievement through Increased Student Support Act. This bill would promote university-school district partnerships to train and employ school counselors, school social workers, and school psychologists where they are needed most. The ultimate goal is to increase student achievement by ensuring that when students are in class, they can really focus on learning, instead of the emotional and social challenges they face outside the classroom.